

Hebron Church  
Near Madison  
Madison County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-411

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VA  
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1-

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared in Washington Office

HABS

VA

57-MAD.V.

HEBRON CHURCH  
Near Madison, Madison Co., Va.

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

Owner: Congregation of Hebron Church

Date: 1740 and 1802, with later alterations.

Condition: Good

Description: The church is frame, one-story, with gable roofs. The main part of the building is said to date from 1740 and the transept from 1802. Victorian alterations deprive the building of an early aspect. The survey photograph shows a picket gate and stile that lead to the churchyard.

Thomas T. Waterman  
May 29. 1941

Addendum to  
Hebron Lutheran Church  
State Routes 638 and 653  
Madison vicinity  
Madison County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-411

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HEBRON LUTHERAN CHURCH

HABS No. VA-411

Addendum to one data page and one photograph previously transmitted to the Library of Congress in 1937.

Location: State Routes 638 and 653, Madison vicinity,  
Madison County, Virginia.

Present Owner and Occupant: Trustees of Hebron Lutheran Church

Present Use: Restored and renovated and in use for Sunday  
services.

Significance: Hebron Lutheran Church is one of four surviving  
wooden churches of Virginia's colonial heritage.  
Constructed in 1740 by German settlers in the  
Madison region near the Robinson River, at the  
time the church and its community represented the  
western-most outpost of the Virginia frontier.

The church is architecturally notable for its  
hewn shipwright's roof truss, an 1802 Tannenberg  
concert organ, and the ornate frescoed ceiling  
from the Victorian era.

The church is historically notable for having the  
distinction of being the oldest Lutheran Church  
in continuous use by its congregation in the  
United States. It is structurally sound but in  
need of plastering and paint.

## History of Hebron Church

The Hebron Church of today is cruciform in plan, constructed with heavy timber framing, horizontal clapboarding and two intersecting gable roofs. When it was first built in 1740 the structure measured fifty feet long by twenty-six feet wide by thirty feet high. This original building now serves as the transept, or the east/west axis of the cruciform plan. The nave and gallery to the south which completed the cruciform plan were additions made circa 1800 to the rectangular original. A small vestry was built on the north side of the 1740 church, but it was replaced by a larger vestry (twelve by fourteen feet) in 1961.

According to early church records, there were originally three doorways on the south, east, and west elevations leading into the sanctuary. The pulpit was positioned against the north wall in the center of the chancel, not to the right side of the chancel where it is seen today.

The heavy timber framing in this domestic looking church was hewn by carpenters in the congregation. The year of the church's dedication, "1740", was carved into the summer beam nearest the eastern wall. Recently the date has been painted onto the beam. The carving is no longer apparent.

The east and west doorways are off-center to the south about two feet, in order to position the aisle away from the center columns supporting the galleries. The gallery columns which stand near the center of the transept would have bisected the aisle had the aisle been positioned along the central axis.

Between the years 1790-1802 the major addition of the southern nave and gallery was constructed. The south organ gallery measures twenty-six feet east-west by twenty-four feet north-south. Also during this period of construction the fine Tannenberg organ was brought from Pennsylvania and installed in the new gallery. The organ can still be heard at Sunday morning service. Unlike the hewn timbers used in the original church building, the southern wing was built with machine sawn timbers. The interior cornice work in this section of the church dates from this period.

The original 1740 box pews were removed in 1850 and replaced with the bench pews now in use. The raised panals from the removed box pews were reused for the fronts of the three galleries and as the wainscoting along the walls. An examination of the wainscoting in a 1961 rennovation confirmed this fact, when it was revealed that the hidden backs of the wainscoting were painted the same color as the exposed fronts. It was concluded that the backs had once been open to view as they would have been when serving as box pews. The rail in front of the pew nearest the vestry consisted of a simple timber with a curtain hung over it during the colonial era. It was replaced in the early 1900's with a solid wooden panal. The hardwood floors of the two original galleries above the east/west wings are purported to be original, while the stairs and the ground floor have been replaced with new timbers and carpet as recently as 1961.

The skeletal members in the colonial braced-frame construction are still intact and can be examined closely in the roof trusses above the plaster ceiling. Access to the roof truss is found through a small hatch in the ceiling to the rear of the east gallery. Handmade nails and wooden pegs found in the trusses confirm the authenticity of the early colonial construction when this building method was typical. In 1961 when the clapboarding was replaced on the exterior skin, roman numerals were seen on the framing members in the wall. These numbers would have been used to identify joints and to insure that each member was aligned properly before installation.

The two east/west galleries are each supported by a single column positioned near the center of the gallery span. The column on the west is said to be the original and can be identified by the chamfering with "lamb's tongue" and the exaggerated entasis. The east column has been replaced with a like copy. The southern gallery which contains the organ improved upon the design of the east/west galleries by spacing two columns, instead of one, on both sides of the center aisle. This solved the problem of the column obstructing the aisle. The columns beneath the southern gallery are similar in size to the others but without the entasis and fine handcarving.

All of the windows are square-headed, varied in size, and placed atypically. Large nine-over-nine windows

were installed originally on the north wall on each side of the centrally placed chancel. To the outer sides of the large windows a smaller window was abutted. High up near the peak of the gable ends, east and west, another large window was put, conspicuously unaligned with the axis of the door below. These two gable windows once lit the slave galleries when the high roof truss ceiling was unobscured by the later addition of the lowered plaster ceiling. Today only a small part of the extended ceiling remains open above the organ loft. The conversion to a low, horizontal, plastered ceiling was made in the late 1800's to accommodate mural paintings. Though the murals that now adorn the ceiling are attractive, it is unfortunate that the modification was made at the expense of covering up the expertly crafted roof truss system.

Two artists contributed to the ornate designs that were added to the church's interior during the Victorian era. The first set of murals was painted by Francis Staling of Harrisonburg in 1870. The second set of designs were executed by a more famous artist, Giuseppe Oddenino. Mr. Oddenino was also responsible for other elaborate paintings in the Mitchell's Presbyterian Church in neighboring Culpepper County. His work at Hebron Church consisted of six large panels over the chancel and nave, completed in 1885. Four of Oddenino's panels survive today despite the many alterations made to the building since then. The earlier work by Mr. Staling, sadly, were lost to changes made behind the pulpit and under the galleries.

The roof truss system of the 1739 church building remain intact and sound. The joint details and the curved shape of each hewn timber make the truss the most interesting construction aspect of the structure. The bell-shaped roof line is apparent in the subtle "kick" near the eaves on the standing seam tin roof. An outrigger on the inside truss frame is spliced off each rafter to account for the "kick" seen from the exterior.

The pulpit once took the shape of a gooset with a sounding board mounted from the rear wall. It was replaced in 1850, again in 1870, and most recently in 1961 as the liturgies and years of wear required rebuilding. In 1864 new sills were installed in the windows, the now-replaced north vestry room was rebuilt, and the standing seam roof and modern blinds added. The church was wired for electricity as late as 1935 when the floors were renovated and the pews rebuilt for the third time.

The original foundation consisted of many stone piers which were filled in in 1870 to become a continuous stone foundation wall. The stonework was removed and replaced with concrete block and brick veneer in restoration work done in 1961. The small narthex on the southern elevation was joined to the nave at this time.

The highlight of the 1790-1802 building phase was the Tannenberg concert organ, built by David Tannenberg of Lititz, Pennsylvania. It is an unusually fine organ, considered to be one of the finest of its type in Virginia. The keys on the keyboard are inversely colored; the standard white keys are instead made of black ebony, and the standard black keys are made of ivory. The remarkably robust sound produced with only eight stops adds another special quality to Hebron's distinctiveness.

The history of Hebron Church chronicles a process of organic growth and continuous modification. The church building has been significantly modified in the five or six building campaigns that span two centuries. The historical "purity" of Hebron's colonial heritage may be questioned as a result, but one may argue persuasively that the cultural richness of the church is more honestly expressed in the eclectic building today. The continuous use of the church since its 1740 dedication proves that it has successfully responded to the changing needs and tastes of its congregation for over ten generations.



CHAIN OF TITLE

The following is the chain of title to the property on which Hebron Church was built, and for the structure as well following its construction in 1740. Deed records can be found at the Clerk's Office, Madison County Courthouse, Madison, with the one exception of the original 1739 deed which is on record in the Clerk's Office, County of Orange, Orange, Virginia. Each deed is referenced by either Deed Book (DB) or Plat Book (PB) followed by the volume number and page.

1739, July 21, DB 3-298  
grantor: Thomas Farmer  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church,  
Michael Glore, trustee

"Thomas Farmer...granted to Michael Glore that tract of land by estimation six hundred and eighty-five acres...at the price of five shillings sterling..."

1870, April 19, DB 23-137  
grantor: U. Carpenter and Wife and Children  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"What for and in consideration of the sum of three thousand dollars...in trust for the use and benefit of the aforesaid church, and as and for a residence for the ministers and pastors thereof...a certain tract of the late Ephraim Carpenter, and including the mansion house..."

1902, Jan. 17, DB 26-303  
grantor: J.C. Crigler and wife  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"...in consideration of the sum of one dollar, grant unto said trustees of Hebron Lutheran Church...a certain parcel of land lying South and West of the road leading to said church..."

1906, Feb. 21, DB 38-488  
grantor: H.B. Fray and wife  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"That in consideration of the sum of one hundred and forty three dollars the parties...do grant...a certain tract of land...adjoining the Lutheran Church Lot. Said lot hereby conveyed is to be used as a cemetery, which shall be under the control of trustees of above mentioned church."

1917, July 10, DB 43-481  
grantor: H.B. Fray and wife  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"That in consideration of the sum of two hundred and forty dollars...the said parties do grant...their right, title, and interest in two certain lots adjoining the lands of said Church lot and Cemetery."

1930, Oct. 24, DB 50-137 (Contract)  
grantor: Madison Power Co., Inc.  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"The said party of the first part agrees to construct, operate, and maintain a service line from the furniture factory of E.A. Clore and Son to...the Hebron Lutheran Church...and the said parties of the second part hereby agree to pay a minimum said monthly charge of six dollars per month..."

1954, April 9, FB 3-204  
grantor: Hampson B. Fray and wife  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

Hebron Cemetery map, drawn by Charles Hawkins on the 6th of March, 1949, showing schedule of grave sites, lot numbers, and family plots.

1957, Oct. 23,      DB 74-487 and PB 4-113  
grantor: Claude L. Yowell and wife  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"In consideration of the sum of one dollar...the parties...grant that certain tract of land...containing 3.687 acres, more or less...The parties of the first part reserve unto themselves...a right of way 20 feet wide...along the North side of the Cemetary and thence in a Southernly direction along the Church outlet to the Public road."

1967, Mar. 10,      DB 91-291  
grantor: Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church  
Charlie Tanner, trustee  
grantee: Hebron Lutheran Church

"Charlie Tanner, sole surviving Trustee of Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church...grant two contiguous tracts of land situated in Rapidan Magisterial District of Madison County...tract no. 1 containing 21/40 of an acre...tract no. 2 containing 22 perches... The above two tracts of land comprise all the lands owned by the Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church."

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Huddle, Rev. W.P.; History of Hebron Lutheran Church, from 1717 to 1907, New Market, Va., Henkel and Co., 1908

Rawlings, Scott; Virginia's Colonial Churches Richmond, Virginia, 1968

Waterman, Thomas L.; "Hebron Church", HABS file no. VA-411, architectural description, May 29, 1941, Documents and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Yowell, Claude L.; "A History of Madison County", MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1926

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### General Description

Hebron Lutheran Church is a heavy timber frame, clapboarded, one and one-half story structure with gable roofs. The church was originally rectangular in plan, fifty feet long by twenty-six feet wide by thirty feet high. A small vestry, nine by thirteen feet extended from the center of the northern wall.

In 1802 a southern wing (nave) was added which gave the church its present shape. A Tannenberg concert organ was installed in the gallery of the new wing at this time. In the late 19th century a low plaster ceiling was hung beneath the roof rafters. Decorative frescoes were painted on the new flat ceiling and other Victorian detailings, such as the ornate gas-lamps, transformed the once-colonial appearance of the church.

The building has undergone several renovations and alterations in its 240 year history. The latest major work done in 1961 was to replace the clapboarding on the exterior, remove the unstable rock foundation and replace it with concrete block and brick veneer, and finally to redesign the chancel in the manner of its original colonial appearance.

## Exterior Description

**Overall dimensions:** The church measures 72'0" along the north-south axis and 50'2" along the east-west axis. The transept wings extend 11'10" east and west of the nave. The wings are 26'5" wide. The apex of the roof measures 31'0" from ground level (on the north) or 30'0" when measured from the top of the foundation or the beginning of the clapboarding.

**Foundations:** The original stone foundation, from stones found in the Robinson River, was replaced with concrete block and brick veneer in 1961. The height of the foundation varies from 10" along the north to 18" along the south. The brick veneer is laid in alternating stretcher courses.

**Exterior Wall Sheathing:** The heavy timber skeleton frame of the walls are covered with horizontal clapboarding. The average exposure of the clapboarding is 5½". The thickness of the clapboard at the overlap is ½". Corner boards extend from the foundation to the return at the eave. The sheathing was replaced as recently as 1961 and painted with white enamel.

**Structural System:** The framing is heavy-timber post and stud, with studs every 24" C.C.. The two summer beams that span the width of the transept measure 8" wide by 12" deep, with tenons extending 6" into the end beams. The southern wing, constructed in 1802, is built of machine-sawn timbers. Its frame was covered by the subsequent plaster ceiling and is not open to view now.

**Porches:** Four brick porches extend from each of the four elevations. The major entrance porch on the southern elevation and the two side porches on the east and west have slender metal handrails and Victorian lanterns to the left and right of the double doors. The simple small porch on the north elevation that leads into the vestry is without rails or lanterns.

The picket fence which once encircled the church (see photo #31) was removed in the late 1930's. However, three carriage platforms on the south, east, and west sections of the lawn have survived.

**Chimney:** A single chimney rises above the small vestry behind the chancel wall. The chimney measures 3'6" wide by 2'6" deep at its base and 2'6" by 2'6" from its midpoint upward, where there is a kick from the east side. The fireplace at the chimney's base was blocked-up and walled-over during the 1962 building campaign when forced-air heating was added for the first time.

The large round stones used in the chimney construction (and also the cemetery wall) were taken from the Robinson River nearby. A metal rod braces the chimney at its midpoint and is supported from its mooring on the transept roof.

**Windows and Shutters:** The windows are of two basic types; either nine by nine lights for the large (4'3" wide by 8'7" high) windows, or six by six lights for the small (2'7" wide by 4'3" high) windows. All of the windows have sliding wooden sash and attenuated muntins 3/4" wide. The surrounds are simple box mouldings with an inset shutter stop moulding. The fixed louvered shutters have been removed and put into storage. The metal shutter catches remain attached to the clapboarding outside the window frames.

**Roof:** The roof is almost 1:1 in slope, measuring 43 degrees instead of the true 45 degrees. Most likely, the roof has deflected slightly in its long life. At the eaves the roof kicks out approximately 10 degrees. The original subroofing survives, but the roof surface itself has been replaced several times. The most recent resurfacing in 1962 called for a standing seam metal roof painted in a flat forest green. The box cornice, ogee moulding, and abbreviated returns date from the late 19th century.

## Interior Description

Floor plans: A small basement measuring 6'5" by 12'3" contains the heating and ventilation system for the church. It is entered from a bulkhead on the west elevation.

The ground floor of the church is "T" shaped in plan. Double doors on the south, east, and west elevations enter into the sanctuary. The awkward placement of the gallery columns set the aisle of the transept off-center by about two feet. A disappearing door on the chancel wall leads to the vestry on the north exposure. The three galleries on the south, east, and west are reached via steep corner stairs below each gallery.

Stairway: The stairs to the east and west galleries rise gradually to a midway landing (8" rise, 10" tread), but become much steeper (8" rise, 6" tread) as they approach the gallery level. The stairs leading to the organ gallery are different in that fan-shaped treads are used to turn the corner, and the slope of the upper segment is not as severe. All of the stairs are made of yellow pine stained dark brown.

Flooring: The original flooring at the ground level has been replaced at least two times. In 1962 the floor was relayed with 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide strips of tongue and groove yellow pine. The gallery may still retain its original floor, though this could not be verified. Random sizes of aged yellow pine floorboards (up to 18" in width) were used in the gallery floor.

Walls and Ceilings: Walls and ceiling are plaster on lath, except in the modern vestry addition where gypsum board was used. Painted wainscoting trims the interior walls to a height of 43". Bolection moulding form a chairrail and baseboard edge along the wainscoting.

The plaster ceiling decorated with Oddenino's frescoes shows signs of deterioration in the cracking plaster and sag in some of the panels. The future of these murals will soon be in jeopardy, if no effort is made to stabilize their progressive collapse.

Doorways and Doors: The present-day doors date from the early 20th century. They are all of the same size and type, with simple moulded architrave and

a single panel inset each door, circumscribed with a beaded moulding. The double door on the west entrance has been unable to keep storm water from entering the sanctuary, which has caused water damage to sections of the floorboards and carpet.

Interior trim: The chamfering and entasis of the columns under the east and west galleries are the best visible examples of colonial craftsmanship that have survived. Most of the remaining trim-work dates back to alterations made during the Victorian era, such as the edge beads and half-round engravings of the summer beams. Those mouldings found in the chancel today are conjecturings as to what the colonial chancel may have looked like and are not based on any evidence found in the church.

The hewn shipwright's roof truss, with its intricately carved and notched mortise and tenon connections, has stood for almost 250 years as a testament to the quality of its design and construction. Because of its unique configuration and its historical significance the roof truss deserves to be brought back into view, just as it was for the first 140 years of the church's history.

A conflict exists between the shipwright's roof truss and the Oddenino frescoes, as the latter obscures the former. As both are worthy of preservation, perhaps a compromise could be reached whereby the panels are brought down to receive reinforcement backing and then rehung on the east and west walls of the transept. This solution would leave both the frescoes and the roof truss intact and open to view.



## Site and Surroundings

Orientation and Setting:    The major axis of the church's nave runs south to north from the front entrance towards the chancel. The original axis of the 1740 church was east to west, as the current transept now lies.

The site of the church is off of Route 638, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles north of the town of Madison. The site is 500 feet above sea level with the surrounding hills rising to 3500 feet.

Farmland surrounds Hebron Church in all directions. Hebron's cemetery lies across the road to the south about fifty feet. The church school building stands due east of the church, aligned along the east-west axis of the church's transept.

## PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was produced by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture, during the Fall Semester, 1979. The project was undertaken by Douglas Harnsberger, of the graduate Architectural History program. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not edited by members of the HABS staff, nor produced under their supervision.